V. Rapid Assessment

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I. INTRODUCTION
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I. INTRODUCTION

Once a new record or sighting has been reported and confirmed, a mechanism for rapidly determining the risk associated with the species is needed. The process would also determine if the risk is high enough to warrant immediate eradication. The specific charge to the Rapid Assessment Working Group was to conceptualize and outline an interagency system that will utilize invasive plant specialists to provide rapid distant or (where necessary) on site assessments to determine what should be done about a confirmed new state and/or national record. A number of special issues for consideration by the group were suggested:

❖ Types of local, state, and national specialists that could conduct rapid assessments.
❖ Information that should be gathered during distant and on site assessments.
❖ Available tools/models for conducting rapid assessments.
❖ Potential Roles for Weed Specialists in conducting Rapid Assessments.
❖ Potential roles of Weed Management Areas, State Weed Teams/State Councils, FICMNEW, the ANS Task Force, and other Interagency Groups in rapid assessments.
❖ Need for a National/Interagency SWAT Team to provide on site and distant technical support to agency/interagency weed initiatives.
❖ Potential users of rapid assessment results.
❖ Potential value of establishing a clearinghouse/technical support center for information and distant/on site technical support of invasive plants efforts.
❖ Potential value of creating an alphanumeric classification system for quantifying invasiveness and types of regulatory action that should be taken against a particular species.
❖ Development of a Strawman National Rapid Assessment System.

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II. GROUP DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In their discussion, the group developed some overarching principles to guide a rapid assessment system. They then developed lists of what information is needed in the rapid assessment process, what tools were essential and the steps are that need to be taken and who should be involved in the process.

Within a Rapid Assessment System, three assumptions were made.
1. **Some weed invasions can be stopped or eradicated** if they are detected before they have spread extensively and if the control mechanisms are already in place.
2. **Rapid assessment, to be efficient and effective, is done rapidly and by a small expert group**. If an assessment is conducted rapidly and acted upon, some species can be prevented from reaching an unmanageable stage, but such a process can not work efficiently and still include all stakeholders.
3. **All protocols and methods (as in a contingency plan) are already be in place, using all currently available knowledge**. The protocols should be flexible enough to easily incorporate new information and new technologies as they are developed.

Information Required:

To know the enemy, as full an understanding of the species of concern as possible is necessary. A standard set of information is required to determine the: capability of invasion, the probability of spread, the types of control options, probability of eradication, and what priority level should be attached.

To determine the capability of a species for invasion, we need to know biology of the species which includes: seed production and dispersal mechanisms; natural enemies; native range and habitat; site conditions that allow it to proliferate, and its current national and global distribution.

To determine the possibility of spread and/or incursion, we need to know if the pathways of distribution are species dependent, ecosystem dependent or human activity dependent. Needed information relative to the current infestation is: the estimated rate of spread; and types and availability of vectors of distribution. This discussion may include trade issues for both intentional and unintentional pathways if there is a danger of continuous reintroduction by a foreign pathway. If these pathways are known, it may be possible to predict future locations of invasion of establishment.

To determine the feasibility of control or eradication, specific knowledge of the locations and extent of the local invasion/infestations are needed. However, very detailed information, such as geo-referenced maps, is not needed for rapid assessment. Information must be easily obtainable on the currently available integrated pest management (IPM) methodologies or technologies for controlling the species.

To determine the level of priority to be given to the new introduction or invasion, the threats and impacts, both direct and indirect, on a individual species and the ecosystem, and the cultural, economic and public health impacts to society must be ascertained.

Information is essential on the immediacy, longevity and contagion of these impacts

To maintain transparency, repeatability, and provide documentation, protocols for assessment must have been previously in place. These should be based on species in question and the site/jurisdictions it has invaded. The protocol should include a list of action to be taken.

Tools Required:

Forewarned is forearmed. We need to know what invasive species are here and how they appear to be behaving around the country. We also need to know what resources can be marshaled and what ecosystems are vulnerable to the introduction of a potential pest species, so that rapid assessment is facilitated. Part of a Rapid Assessment System would be a comprehensive assessment of invasive plants in the United States and an assessment of key species not yet known to be here but believed to be a possible threat.

Web-based Information System – Such a system would assist in standardizing information and increase the efficiency of a Rapid Assessment approach. It should contain information about each species, species location databases, list of experts, maps (preferred geo-referenced mapping), primary contacts and jurisdictions, land ownerships, pathway information, etc. Many of these needs have been identified in the Science of Rapid Response (Group 1 of 2). Some of the characteristics needed for Rapid Assessment are that it must be searchable, there needs to be a Gatekeeper, it must meet national and international library standards, be interoperable, shared easily as a Virtual Database.

Organizational Tools Required:

To promote action and use resources efficiently, **an organizational model should be developed to ensure communication and coordination**. There are many organizational protocols in use now that could provide efficient and effective models. The I.D. teams of the USDA FS on Forest Plan development and Action teams and Risk Assessment teams from Environmental protection advocate an interdisciplinary approach to reviewing and providing planning solutions. Private, local, state, national and international partnerships (groups, agencies, and other stakeholders) could be drawn upon to provide the expertise in the Rapid Assessment Process.

The group felt that **all organizational levels of a rapid assessment group should be linked,** from local level up to the National level. They also advocated that "who is doing what and how they interact" should be evaluated for the consistencies and inconsistencies in their intergroup actions. The group felt that a Virtual Global Office concept should be developed to use resources and expertise that were not in the immediate vicinity of each other. Any model that is used for organizing rapid assessment activities needs to be expandable to an all-Risk Model, and must be a formalized structure.

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III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- ❖ *Develop a National Association of State Invasive Species Councils.*
- ❖ *Establish a State Rapid Assessment Committee under the State Council*
- ❖ *Select a Regional Rapid Assessment Coordinator to work with the State Assessment Coordinators, and to serve as a liaison with the National Early Warning Coordinator*
- ❖ *Develop a Flow Chart/checklist for assessment protocols to document that the protocols*
- ❖ *Give training to all those involved in rapid assessment and rapid response and have trials.*
- ❖ *Monitoring protocols and standards must be developed to standardized reporting and follow-up to the State Coordinator.*

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